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SUBJECT: PUNJAB LAWYERS FIGHT FOR AND AMONG THEMSELVES AFTER LONG MARCH

REF: (A) 08 ISLAMABAD 3902; (B) ISLAMABAD 1099

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Lawyers from Punjab have continued the fight for lawyers' rights, but have focused their efforts on improving their own status and ensuring job security. Punjab attorneys have demanded pay raises, housing from the provincial government and a resolution that requires companies to retain legal representation. But the controversial appointment of a new president has dissolved the Lahore High Court Bar Association (LHCBA) into political bickering, further diminishing their political influence. End Summary.

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Resolutions to Secure Position of Lawyers
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¶2. (SBU) In the wake of the March 15 lawyers long march, Punjab's attorneys have continued to fight for lawyers' rights, though not necessarily in the streets. Muqtedir Aktar Shabir, Secretary of Lahore High Court Bar Association (LHCBA), told poloffs on April 13 that the LHCBA will push for the implementation of the Legal Advisor Act of 1974 that requires all public and private companies registered with the government to retain at least one legal representative. Most companies do not retain lawyers and those that do retain the same lawyers, he explained. The Act, he stated, also prohibits a lawyer from advising more than three companies, which allows more employment opportunities for lawyers. Muzamil Aktar Shabir, former Secretary of LHCBA, added that LHCBA will promote a resolution that allows only lawyers to prepare documents, not the "poorly trained draftsmen" who currently act as paralegals. "Draftsmen are not lawyers," he said, "and do not know how to prepare these documents."

¶3. (SBU) In a May 21 follow-up, Shabir told poloff that he had filed a petition before the Supreme Court of Pakistan for the implementation of the Act and he hoped that "the Supreme Court would pass an appropriate order" to protect the rights of lawyers.

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Lawyers Demand Housing
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¶4. (SBU) LHCBA will also continue to request more perks for attorneys who face low pay, Muqtedir Aktar Shabir admitted to poloffs. Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan, Deputy Speaker of Punjab Assembly, told poloffs on March 27 that the Punjab government began construction of a judicial colony, providing housing and transportation to and from the court for the judges in Lahore. He expected the province to build a similar facility for attorneys. Shabir, Secretary of LHCBA, echoed that "we are trying to convince the Punjab and Federal Governments to address this demand but so far no progress has been made."

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Pay Raises for Judges and Lawyers
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¶5. (SBU) In June 2008, the Punjab Government increased three-fold the basic salary of judges of the lower judiciary, recounted Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan. The salaries of district and session judges increased to Rs 120,000 (1,500 dollars) a month; senior civil judges to Rs 48,000 (600 dollars); and civil judges to Rs 32,000 (400 dollars). This pay raise allowed the government to recruit better judges and eliminate bribery, explained Rana Asad Ullah Khan, former Secretary LHCBA. Asad Ullah Khan predicted that additional pay raises and implementation of the housing scheme would occur under Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif. Pay raises are a possibility for lawyers, said Ayesha Javed, Pakistan Muslim League, but would only "affect lawyers holding public office as public prosecutors" and is contingent upon upcoming provincial budget allocations.

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Infighting at Bar Association
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¶6. (SBU) An internal dispute in LHCBA erupted over the accession of Munawar Iqbal Gondal, who became President of Lahore High Court Bar Association on April 14 after LHCBA president Mahmood Shahid Siddiqui moved to the Supreme Court. Former presidents of the Bar Association and over 300 members filed a petition demanding fresh elections but the Lahore High Court dismissed the call for the removal of Gondal as president on May 26. A meeting held on June 5 to resolve the issue ended in a physical brawl as Gondal's opponents attacked him and

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physically removed him from the building. According to press, the following day, 715 of the 8,440 voting members elected Nasira Iqbal as the new president. Gondal has challenged the election before the Punjab Bar Council, a supervisory body that oversees bar associations in the province. [Note: Opponents question Gondal's legitimacy because he supported judges who took oath under the Provisional Constitutional Order. End Note.]

¶7. (SBU) Comment: In the wake of the lawyers march, lawyers were revered for their fight for an independent judiciary and reinstatement of the Chief Justice. Exploiting the success of the long march for their benefit, the lawyers have harnessed their power for personal gain, seeking resolutions to protect their role as lawyers and a provincial housing scheme for lawyers. At a time when they could have used their collective power to challenge the Nizam-e-Adl regulation and work toward effective judicial practices, they concentrated instead on their narrow personal interests and LHCBA political games.

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